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The Migration of Mexican Nationals
into the United States:
A Mounting Issue for the 1970's

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The Migration of Mexican Nationals into the United States:

A Mounting Issue for the 1970's

by Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.*

I. Introduction

The migration of citizens of Mexico (i.e., Mexican Nationals) into the United States has been a fact of life for as long as there has been a political border separating the two nations. During the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the migration was only a small trickle. But the magnitude has increased significantly throughout most of the Twentieth Century until, by the 1970's, it has assumed tidal wave proportions. One knowledgeable U.S. Senator, who led an extensive Congressional inquiry in 1970 of the economic conditions along the southern border, succinctly summarized the prevailing migration situation as being "a massive hemorrhage."¹

In 1973, there were 70,141 Mexican Nationals legally admitted as immigrants to the United States. In that year, as has been the case in most years since 1960, the number of legal Mexican immigrants surpassed the total of any other country in the world. The primary characteristic of the migration of Mexican Nationals, however, is not legal migration but rather it is illegal migration. During 1973, for example, there were 609,673 illegal aliens apprehended in the southwestern quadrant of the United States by the Immigrations and Naturalization Service (INS) of the U.S. Department of Justice. Most of these apprehended individuals were Mexican Nationals. In fact, 88 percent of all illegal aliens apprehended in the United States in 1973 were of Mexican origin.

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The 1973 apprehension figure for the Southwest represented an increase of more than 200,000 illegal aliens over the preceding year. To be sure, the figures are slightly misleading in that there is some double-counting (i.e., the same individuals were arrested more than once during the year). But, when it is realized that those who are actually apprehended represent only a small fraction of the real flow, the thrust of the argument is not slightly dulled if allowances are made for double counting. The INS has officially estimated that there were 3 million illegal aliens who entered the United States during the year of 1973 and who were undetected.² In addition the INS estimates that there are approximately 7 million illegal aliens currently residing in the United States.³ Without fear of contradiction, it can be said that the overwhelming proportion of each category of illegal aliens -- those who are apprehended each year; those flowing-in who are not apprehended each year; and those who compose the accumulated number over the years who have gone undetected -- are of Mexican origin.

Thus, to set the tone for this paper, legal migration from Mexico is an important but not significant migration factor; it far exceeded in both number and consequences by illegal entry. With respect to the quantitative impact of illegal Mexican entry, it is informative to note that, from 1939 to 1973, approximately 9 million persons immigrated to the United States from all of the countries of the world. During the same time period, more than 9 million illegal Mexican aliens were apprehended and deported to Mexico. As for the consequences, it can be noted that most illegal Mexican Nationals enter the United States economy as workers whereas almost half of the legal Mexican immigrants are dependents.

This paper will seek to describe some of the characteristics of this mass migration movement and to highlight some of the implications.

II. Brief Historical Overview

The vast land area that presently composes the American Southwest was acquired by conquest. The land area -- approximately the size of present-day India -- was ceded to the United States under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 which formally ended the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. An additional strip of land was bought from Mexico in 1853 (i.e., the Gadsden Purchase) after American railroad interests realized that the most practical route to California was in the Gila Valley (mostly in the present-day state of Arizona) which had not been included in the ceded territory. Mexico was in no position to object to the sale request. The Mexican-American War had been fought over land, not people. But as a result of the provisions of the Treaty and the Gadsden Purchase approximately 75,000 people of Mexican citizenry were given the choice of becoming citizens of the United States or returning to Mexico.⁴ Most elected to remain in the territory of their ancestors. Many believed that their land was only temporarily "occupied." During the balance of the Nineteenth Century, fewer than 30,000 Mexican Nationals immigrated into this region.

It was not until the Twentieth Century that the number of migrating Mexican Nationals became numerically significant. During the period 1910 to 1930, an estimated 750,000 Mexican Nationals legally migrated into the United States.⁵ The short-run "push" force was the extreme violence that accompanied the civil war in Mexico that raged between 1910-1919. The immediate "pull" forces were the establishment and expansion of agricultural development throughout the American Southwest and the domestic

labor shortages that occurred during the World War I period. Immigrants from Mexico were excluded from the National Origins Act of 1924 which set numerical quotas by nationality for immigrants from all non-Western hemisphere nations.

During the 1930's the process was reversed. The mass unemployment in the United States set forth a movement in the Southwest to "repatriate" Mexican Nationals residing in the United States. The fact that many of these people had married American citizens or were people who were eligible for citizenship but had not formally completed the immigration process was no barrier to those who believed it was necessary to reduce the regional labor pool. As it was, numerous whites from the "dust bowl" areas of Texas and Oklahoma were pouring into the agricultural labor market in California so that a new source of cheap labor was available and willing to work if a job could be found. It was also during the 1930's that the first large scale efforts to apprehend illegal aliens was launched. Over 200,000 such aliens (mostly Mexican Nationals) were deported between 1930 and 1940.⁶ These deportations were in addition to the several hundred thousand more (the exact number is unknown) who were forcibly "repatriated" during the same decade. Legal immigration from Mexico fell to about 27,000.⁷

In the 1940's, with the advent of the Second World War, the situation switched again. Economic conditions had changed markedly. The military requirements of the nation and its related manufacturing needs led to a labor shortage in the agricultural sector. The agriculture growers of the Southwest had foreseen these developments prior to the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. They had made two fateful decisions: first, the pool of cheap labor in Mexico was to be tapped to fill the manpower deficit; second, the Federal government was to be the vehicle of deliverance.⁸

Although the initial requests of U.S. growers for the establishment of a contract labor program were denied by the Federal government in 1941, they were favorably received by mid-1942. Mexico, however, balked at the proposal for a formal inter-government agreement. The Mexican economy was flourishing; there were fears of Mexican workers being drafted; there were bitter memories of the "reparation drive" of the 1930's; and there was knowledge of the discriminatory treatment accorded people of Mexican ancestry throughout the Southwest. The unregulated hiring of Mexican citizens by foreign nations had been prohibited by Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917.

Lengthy negotiations between the two governments resulted in a formal agreement in August 1942. The Mexican Labor Program, better known as the "bracero program," was launched. Workers were to be afforded numerous protections with respect to housing, transportation, food, medical needs, and wage rates. Initiated through appropriations for P.L. 45, the program was extended by subsequent enactments until 1947. For the growers the bracero program was a "bonanza."⁹ Braceros were limited exclusively to agricultural work. Any bracero who found a job in another industry was subject to immediate deportation. When the agreement ended December 31, 1947, the program was continued informally and was unregulated until 1951. In that year, again under the cloak of war-related labor shortages, the bracero program was formalized into P.L. 78. The program continued to function until it was unilaterally terminated by the United States on December 31, 1964. The government of Mexico has made numerous proposals for the resumption of the program but, to date, the United States has not acceded.¹⁰

Paralleling the bracero years during the 1950's and early 1960's and succeeding then since 1964 has been the mammoth flow of illegal Mexican Nationals. Many of these illegal aliens were former braceros who had been attracted to the Mexican border towns from the rural interior of Mexico by the existence of the former contract labor program. To this degree, there is some truth to the proposition that the United States has created the illegal alien problem itself. By the same token, however, it is too simplistic to conclude that the problem would not have eventually surfaced in the absence of the bracero program. Much more is involved.

III. The Magnitude and Character of the Immigrant Flow from Mexico

To gain perspective, it is useful to examine the statistics that indicate the magnitude of Mexican immigrants over time. Table 1 shows the annual number of legal immigrants from Mexico to the United States since 1869. Table 2 presents the data on illegal entry from Mexico since 1924. Although Table 2 covers a much shorter time period, a comparison of the totals show that the aggregate number of apprehended illegal Mexican Nationals exceeds the aggregate number of legal immigrants by a ratio of better than 4 to 1. Indeed, the number of apprehended Mexican aliens has been in excess of the number of Mexican immigrants every year since 1930. But the gap has been widening perceptively in recent years with the ratio being larger than 8 to 1 in 1973.

In addition to the sheer numbers of people involved, it is necessary to note that the characteristics of the two groups of Mexican immigrants are quite different. The features of the migrants tell much about the consequences of the immigration process to the United States labor market.

Looking first at the legal immigrants, it is necessary to briefly place Mexican immigrants into the context of all legal immigrants. The contemporary immigration system of the United States is, in substance, designed to accomplish three goals: (1) to unify families; (2) to admit workers with skills that are in short supply; and (3) to permit entry to a small number of political refugees.¹¹ Since the end of World War II and with the enactment of major immigration statutes in 1952 and 1965, the characteristics of legal immigrants to the United States have moved very close to resembling the characteristics of the general norms of the United States population. A careful study of immigrants into the United States that was published in 1973 found:

Immigrants, although still differing from the rest of the population in terms of national origin are now closer to the American norm when one considers age, sex ratios, marital status, geographic distribution among the states, labor force participation, and occupational distribution.¹²

The legal immigrants from Mexico during the past 25 years have resembled these patterns for all legal immigrants to the United States. That is to say, the number of females slightly exceeds the number of males; the average age is somewhat younger; the marital status distribution is about the same; there is a strong preference for urban areas; and they have approximately the same labor force participation rate as is the United States average. There are, however, several important variations between legal Mexican immigrants and other legal immigrants. The foremost difference is their overwhelming preference to reside in one of the five southwestern states. Another factor is that legal Mexican immigrants are more likely to have friends and relatives who are already citizens of the United States than are other immigrant groups. But perhaps most important is the fact that legal Mexican immigrants tend to have a significantly different occupational distribution from that of other legal

Table 1: Legal Immigration from Mexico to the United States,
1869-1973

Year	Total Immigrants	Year	Total Immigrants	Year	Total Immigrants
1869	320	1909	16,251	1949	7,977
1870	463	1910	17,760	1950	6,841
1871	402	1911	18,784	1951	6,372
1872	569	1912	22,001	1952	9,600
1873	606	1913	10,954	1953	18,454
1874	386	1914	13,089	1954	37,456
1875	610	1915	10,993	1955	50,772
1876	631	1916	17,198	1956	65,047
1877	445	1917	16,438	1957	49,154
1878	465	1918	17,602	1958	26,712
1879	556	1919	28,844	1959	23,061
1880	492	1920	51,042	1960	32,684
1881	325	1921	29,603	1961	41,632
1882	366	1922	18,246	1962	55,291
1883	469	1923	62,709	1963	55,253
1884	430	1924	87,648	1964	32,967
1885	323	1925	32,378	1965	37,969
1886	N.A.	1926	42,638	1966	45,163
1887	N.A.	1927	66,766	1967	42,371
1888	N.A.	1928	57,765	1968	43,563
1889	N.A.	1929	38,980	1969	44,623
1890	N.A.	1930	11,915	1970	44,469
1891	N.A.	1931	2,627	1971	50,103
1892	N.A.	1932	1,674	1972	64,040
1893	N.A.	1933	1,514	1973	<u>70,141</u>
1894	109	1934	1,470		
1895	116	1935	1,232	Total	1,754,681
1896	150	1936	1,308		
1897	91	1937	1,918		
1898	107	1938	2,014		
1899	163	1939	2,265		
1900	237	1940	1,914		
1901	347	1941	2,068		
1902	700	1942	2,182		
1903	528	1943	3,985		
1904	1,009	1944	6,399		
1905	2,637	1945	6,455		
1906	1,997	1946	6,805		
1907	1,406	1947	7,775		
1908	6,067	1948	8,730		

N.A. = Date Not Available

Sources: For years 1869-1969, the data is taken from Table 1-A of a paper presented by Julian Samora, "Mexican Immigration" at the Conference on Economic and Educational Perspectives of the Mexican American (Aspen, Colorado, August 27, 1972), (mimeographed material); the figures for 1970-1973 are from Annual Reports of U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Table 2: Illegal Mexican Nationals Apprehended and/or Deported,
1924-1973

Year	Number of People	Year	Number of People
1924	4,614	1950	469,581
1925	2,961	1951	510,355
1926	4,047	1952	531,719
1927	4,495	1953	839,149
1928	5,529	1954	1,035,282
1929	8,538	1955	165,186
1930	18,319	1956	58,792
1931	8,409	1957	45,640
1932	7,116	1958	45,164
1933	15,875	1959	42,732
1934	8,910	1960	39,750
1935	9,139	1961	39,860
1936	9,534	1962	41,200
1937	9,535	1963	51,230
1938	8,684	1964	41,589
1939	9,376	1965	48,948
1940	8,051	1966	89,638
1941	6,082	1967	107,695
1942	10,603	1968	142,520
1943	16,154	1969	189,572
1944	39,449	1970	265,539
1945	80,760	1971	348,178
1946	116,320	1972	430,213
1947	214,543	1973	655,968
1948	193,852		
1949	289,400		
		Total	7,345,840

Note: There is a considerable problem with the exact figures used to report illegal aliens. The official definitions have changed over time. Nevertheless, these figures do reflect correctly the orders of magnitude.

Source: For the years 1924-1941, see Table III in Samora's Paper cited as source in Table I of this paper; for 1942-1973, see Vernon M. Briggs, Jr, The Mexico-United States Border: Public Policy and Chicano Economic Welfare (Austin, Texas: Center for the Study of Human Resources, 1974), p. 9.

entrants. For although Mexican immigrants have backgrounds in most occupations, a disproportionately high number are in blue collar and service occupations and a lower percentage are from white collar occupations. Legal Mexican immigrants tend to have higher concentrations in craftsmen, household service worker, non-farm laborers, and farm laborers occupations.¹³ The explanation for this occupational difference from other groups is likely to be due to the fact that a significant number of legal immigrants were once illegal aliens.

For illegal Mexican immigrants the statistical profile is, of course, much more difficult to specify as the actual universe is unknown. Even those apprehended often are reluctant to answer questions honestly. Nevertheless, from the limited research that is available, it is obvious that the illegal aliens have distinctly different set of characteristics. Typically the illegal alien is male, usually unmarried, younger than 30 years of age, unskilled, from a rural area, poorly educated, speaks little if any English, is likely to be employed at least some time in the rural economy of the United States, and is most likely to be employed in an unskilled occupation as either a farm or non-farm laborer.¹⁴

As indicated earlier, there is a degree of inter-relationship between the legal and illegal flows. That is to say, many illegal Mexican aliens later become legal Mexican immigrants. This happens because an illegal alien may marry a U.S. citizen, or have a child born in the United States who is eligible for citizenship, or because the alien is able to make political connections with a sympathetic community organization or an influential employer. Should one of these circumstances occur, it is likely that the one-time illegal alien will qualify as a legal immigrant who can gain admission outside of the established immigrant quota system.

Thus, a migration process that began with a small indigenous population of Mexicans whose territory was conquered and whose citizenship was changed by treaty terms has gradually evolved from a "pioneer" immigration process into a mass migration movement.

IV. The Causes of Mexican Migration

Most sizeable migrations of human beings are the combined result of both "pull" and "push" forces. This has certainly been the case with respect to the movement of Mexican Nationals.

The Long Run "Pull" Forces

The primary "pull" forces is the obvious difference between the economies of the United States and Mexico which share a common 1,800 mile border. Nowhere else on Earth does a political border separate two nations with a greater economic disparity. In 1972, the Gross National Product of the United States was over \$1.1 trillion; for Mexico it was \$37 billion. The per capita income of the United States was \$5,288 while in Mexico it was slightly about \$707.¹⁵ The amount of this difference exceeds the per capita income of every nation in the world except that of Sweden. The vast economic disparity between the nations acts as a human magnet for both legal and illegal migrants. For most Mexican migrants, life in the United States by any barometer of human treatment will represent a considerable improvement over the life left behind.

A second factor is the migration policy of the United States toward Mexico. With the brief exception of the depression decade of the 1930's, it has been the demand for a cheap source of unskilled labor that has been the overriding characteristic of "official" and "unofficial" policy. Mexicans have been welcomed as workers but not as settlers. The migration over the years has been geared to domestic labor policy (especially in agriculture) and not to a settlement process. The fact that

United States policy in the 1970's is so tolerant of the wave of illegal entrants; so timid in the enforcement of its existing laws which prohibit illegal entry; and so hesitant to assume a posture of deterrence, can lead to only one conclusion: namely, labor policy continues to dominate settlement consideration.¹⁶

The third factor that is involved is that the cultural affinity that exists between many Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans (called hereafter "Chicanos").¹⁷ As indicated earlier there have been people of Mexican ancestry living in what is now the southwestern United States long before there ever was a United States. Since the acquisition of the region by the United States in 1848, a number of Mexicans remained in their homeland. Over the years, they were joined by many others. In fact, the boundary between the United States and Mexico was an "open border" until 1924 when the Border Patrol was established and restrictions on immigration were imposed for the first time. Even though Mexico was not included in the immigration quotas enacted by the Immigration Act of 1924 (i.e., more commonly known as the National Origin Act), restrictions were imposed on the ease of entry of Mexicans and all other immigrants into the United States. It became for the first time a felony offense to enter the United States illegally. The flow of legal immigrants from Mexico has -- with the exception of the 1930's -- generally increased each year. The Immigration Act of 1965 (which did not become effective until mid-1968) enacted for the first time a quota as to the number of legal immigrants to be allowed from Western Hemisphere nations. The figure was set at 120,000 with no more than 40,000 to be admitted from any single country. The actual number of immigrants each year from Western Hemisphere nations regularly exceeds these fixed maximums. This is because parents, spouses, and under-age children of U.S. citizens

are not counted in the quotas. Hence, for 1973, there were a total of 173,123 legal immigrants from the Western Hemisphere of whom 70,141 legal immigrants from Mexico. The percentage of Mexican immigration of the total immigration from Western Hemisphere nations has increased each year since the imposition of the quota. In 1969 legal Mexican immigrants accounted for 29% of the total; by 1973 they were 40% of the total. Thus, the illegal Mexican aliens of the 1970's enter into a nation that already has a population in excess of 6.5 million Chicanos. Over 80 percent of these Chicanos reside in the five states (California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado) of the American Southwest. Most of the major cities in these five states already have sizeable Chicano communities in which an immigrant or alien can find familiar food, language, cultural traditions, and, maybe, even friends or relatives. For example, Los Angeles, California (with its "official" 1.5 million Chicano population) has a numerically larger population of people of Mexican ancestry than any city in all of Mexico except only for Mexico City.

A fourth "pull" factor is the anomaly of the current state of the law in the United States with respect to the employment of illegal aliens.¹⁸ Namely, it is against the law for an illegal alien to seek employment but it is not against the law for an employer to hire an illegal alien. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 made the importation and harboring of illegal aliens a felony. As a concession to Texas agricultural interests, however, the act contains the famous "Texas proviso." This section states that employment and the related services provided by employers to employees (i.e., transportation, housing, or feeding) do not constitute an illegal act of harboring. The effect of the "proviso" is to make employers largely immune from prosecution if they hire such workers. Even employers whose premises are

raided regularly by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) are rarely prosecuted. Thus, one of the most important barriers to effective control of illegal entrants is the fact that the act of employment of an illegal alien is not itself illegal. Since an employer incurs no risk, he is free to hire illegal aliens which encourages the continuation of the flow across the border. Because of the burgeoning dimensions of the issue, extensive public hearings were held by a subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives during 1971 and 1972. A bill that would require employers to make a "good faith" effort to determine whether their employees are legal citizens of this country was passed by the House in September 1972 by an overwhelming vote. The proposed legislation contained sanctions against employers who hire illegal aliens, ranging from initial warnings to fines and jail terms for repeat offenses. The bill was not passed by the Senate. A similar bill was introduced in the House and subsequently passed in May 1973. As of October 1974 the Senate had still not acted on the bill.

As for the illegal aliens themselves, it is only an unimportant technicality that the law makes it a punishable offense to seek employment in the United States. In reality over 95 percent of those aliens who are apprehended by the INS are simply returned to Mexico by the most expedient form of transportation at the expense of the Federal government. Less than 5 percent of the illegal Mexican nationals are subjected by the INS to formal deportation proceedings that would render any subsequent entry a felony.¹⁹ More numerous prosecutions could serve as a deterrent. Neither Congress nor the President have believed to date that the issue warrants a sufficient increase in the number of hearing officers to raise significantly the level of prosecutions. As a result, those aliens allowed to leave through the voluntary departure system are in no way deterred from returning at will.

Thus, a realistic appraisal of the current situation is that if an illegal alien is caught, he is simply returned to his native land; if he is not apprehended, he works at a job that affords him an income higher than his alternatives in Mexico. For the businessman there is no risk of loss. There are only gains from tapping a cheap source of labor that is completely bound to his arbitrary terms of employment. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 expressly states that it is national policy to reserve available jobs for the domestic labor force. Referring to this act, the California Court of Appeals ruled in 1970 that the number of illegal aliens in the Southwest "represents an abject failure of national policy." Moreover, the court observed that the lack of meaningful corrective action "must be ascribed to self-imposed impotence of our national government."²⁰

There is a fifth "pull" factor which is of minor significance in comparison with the aforementioned forces but, nonetheless, of some consequence. Namely, the lure of what is perceived to be "a promised land."²¹ There are "word-of-mouth" accounts of better job opportunities, high wages, and improved living conditions that circulate from returnees and from letters containing remittances to family members who remain behind. These tales are often exaggerated or, at least, tend to minimize the negative aspects of survival on the lowest rung of the economic ladder in the United States. Nonetheless, it remains true that, in purely economic terms, life is likely to offer far more options than the arduous and stifling prospects of perpetual poverty for most who choose to remain in northern and central Mexico.

The Long Run "Push" Forces

Contrary to what one might expect, the impetus for outward migration from Mexico in the 1970's is not due to the fact that the Mexican economy is stagnant. In fact, Mexico has for the past decade had the fastest rate of economic growth of any country in all of Latin America. The Gross National Product since the late 1960's has been increasing annually at a rate of 6 percent or more with per capita income increasing annually at about 3 percent a year.²² Yet, the Mexican economy is organized on a basis of state regulated capitalism whereby the benefits of industrialization accrue disproportionately to the small upper income sector. Pitifully little filters down to the vast lower income group.²³ Thus, the massive migration of Mexican Nationals who are mostly from this lower income strata represents a safety-valve for the Mexican government to reduce the potential problems that could arise from its maldistribution of income and its surplus labor force. The Mexican economy is moving from an agriculture and handicraft phase into an industrial and technological stage. The political regime in power in Mexico feels it needs time to complete this transition. Moreover, the illegal aliens frequently bring back or send portions of their earnings which, in the aggregate, amounts to a substantial sum of American dollars. As a result, illegal entry is one way to gain desperately needed foreign exchange and help Mexico's external balance of trade.

But despite the fact that the Mexican economy is growing, it remains an underdeveloped country. For most of the population, extreme poverty is the way of life.²⁴ Unemployment rates in Mexican cities that border with the United States consistently hover in the 30-40% range. For many farmers and agricultural workers in Mexico's central and northern states, a hundred days of employment a year is the most that can be expected. When work is available, it is often of a hard physical nature

for which the monetary reward is but a pittance. In 1970, 41.3 percent of Mexico's population resided in rural areas. The minimum wage in Mexico's border cities -- although varying from locality to locality -- is never more than one-third of the minimum wage across the border in the United States. The population birth rate of Mexico is among the highest in the world (about 3.5 percent a year).²⁵ In the rural areas of Mexico, the population birth rate is acknowledged to exceed the alarmingly high national rate. Over 23 percent of the population is estimated to be illiterate. Droughts, pestilence, and diseases are common throughout the rural states. Housing is poor and, frequently, of a makeshift variety. Inadequate diets and malnutrition cause pervasive health problems. The situation would be bad enough if the national government of Mexico manifested any serious concern with the issue of the poverty that entraps so many of its citizens. But, the fact of the matter is that little national attention is directed to the plight of these people. To make matters worse, Mexico refuses to consider the idea of direct foreign aid to reduce the level of human cruelty within the nation. The "national pride" of the small affluent class that tightly controls the political system of Mexico is largely oblivious to internal pleas for reform and contemptuous of external offers of direct assistance.²⁶ All things considered, therefore, it is understandable why many rural peasants and urban slum dwellers would seek to flee from the grinding poverty that is to many their destiny for as long as they remain in their homeland. The migration process is not seen by the participants as anything illegal or immoral. To the contrary, the topic is discussed openly and the procedures have been both regularized and ritualized. The process is often viewed an accepted part of the fate of poor

people. Many of these poor people do not regard the potential threat of being jailed or placed into a detention camp as a deterrent form of punishment. Rather jails are seen as a place that poor people will often be during their lives. Imprisonment is seen as fate so that nothing is lost in an effort to swim across a river as a "wetback" or cut a fence as an "alambrista."

Closely associated with the pace of industrialization and incidence of poverty factors is the existence of a strong secular trend throughout Mexico of rural to urban migration. The internal migrations have been toward two destinations: Mexico City and the northern cities located along the border with the United States. As can be seen in Table 3, the numerical and percentage growth rates of the eight largest border towns of Mexico have increased by 44 percent in the decade between 1960-1970. The growth rate of parallel United States border cities has also been very high and their growth is not unrelated to the topic of the migration of Mexican Nationals. The Mexican border towns, however, were most-~~com~~ ly poverty stricken to begin with. The stacking-up of the poor rural migrants who have piled into these border cities has completely over-ridden the ability of these municipalities to provide a semblance of community services.²⁷ It is not surprising that there is literally no interest in these cities by the Mexican government to stop the out-flow. In fact, there is much to be gained. From the public services standpoint, any slow-down in the rate of migrants into their cities can only be beneficial in their quest to provide basic human services. From a private sector perspective, there is a thriving border business in the organized smuggling of human beings into the United States; the forgery of identification papers (i.e., Social Security cards, drivers licences, passports, etc.); and loan-sharking (i.e., the practice of charging

Table 3: Numerical and Percentage Population Growths in Border Cities
(1960 - 1970)

City	1960	1970	Percent Increase
Brownsville	48,040	52,522	9%
Matamoros	143,043	182,887	28%
McAllen	32,728	37,636	15%
Reynosa	134,869	143,514	6%
Laredo	60,678	69,024	14%
Nuevo Laredo	96,043	150,922	58%
Eagle Pass	12,094	15,364	26%
Piedras Negras	48,408	65,883	38%
El Paso	276,687	322,261	20%
Cd. Juarez	276,995	436,054	58%
Nogales, Ariz.	7,286	8,946	22%
Nogales, Son.	39,812	52,865	32%
Calexico	7,992	10,625	32%
Mexicali	281,333	390,411	38%
San Diego	573,224	696,769	22%
Tijuana	165,690	335,125	102%
Entire Border:			
United States	2,349,157	2,847,565	21%
Mexico	1,485,791	2,133,454	44%

Source: Annual Report - 1971 of the Texas Good Neighbor Commission

exorbitant interest rates on loans or credit extensions given to cover the charges by smugglers and document forgers.)²⁸

Thus, when the "pull" and "push" forces are combined, it is obvious that the accumulating momentum for illegal entry is so strong that it may be impossible already for public policy to control even if an effort were to be made. The dire warning of the Commissioner of INS in 1971 that the problem of illegal entry into the United States "has grown progressively worse" and his woeful prediction for the future that "border violations will continue to mount" has, not surprisingly, proven to be the voice of a Cassandra.²⁹

V. The Consequences of Mexican Migration

In general, the impact of immigration from all nations of the world upon the labor market of the United States in the 1970's has not been well understood. Since the Immigration Act of 1965 became effective in 1968, there have been about 400,000 legal immigrants admitted to the country each year. Of these it is estimated that approximately 200,000 legal immigrants enter the U.S. labor market each year.³⁰ They have in the 1970's accounted for about 12 percent of the annual increase in the labor force. The "substantial impact" that these legal immigrants have is because their presence is unevenly felt: affecting cities more than suburbs and rural areas; some states more than others; and some occupations more than others.³¹ With regard to legal Mexican immigrants, they have exerted their influence upon the labor markets of the major cities of the southwestern United States, the states of California and Texas; and the blue collar and service occupations. Except for several specific border communities, the impact of the legal immigrants from Mexico has yet to become an overwhelming problem.

The significance of the illegal Mexican Nationals, however, is an entirely different story. The massive flow of illegal immigrants has had, is having, and will continue to cause a serious disruption in the normal labor force adjustment processes throughout the Southwest and, increasingly, in some northern cities (e.g., Chicago, Lansing, and Detroit).

The illegal Mexican aliens constitute a body of workers who are totally dependant upon the terms of employment dictated by an employer. The aliens, usually grateful for the pittance they receive, are willing to work long, hard, and for low pay. They have become a "shadow labor force" -- especially in the Southwest -- whose presence is often felt but seldom seen. In the industries in which they congregate, they depress wages and working conditions to such a degree that citizen workers cannot compete with them. The citizen workers must either choose to work and live as the illegal alien; or move to another region; or seek another occupation.³²

Historically the impact of the illegal Mexican immigrant has been felt in the rural economy of the Southwest. Having typically come from a rural background with little knowledge of either urban work skills or of the English language, it was easier for the illegal alien to find employment in the rural areas. Moreover, the rural southwestern United States is a vast land area with a small population. The climate is dry and water is very scarce. The population pattern has been correctly referred to as being "an oasis society."³³ Hence, the large agricultural growers and ranchers have usually not been able to draw upon a labor supply in their local areas. Their needs are especially acute during planting and harvesting seasons when there is a need for large numbers of workers. The growers and ranchers have been more than willing to employ the cheap and totally dependant illegal aliens to meet their manpower needs. Sad to say, there are numerous accounts of illegal aliens being paid wages below

prescribed minimum wage levels and of employers turning-in their alien workers to immigration authorities at the end of the season prior to the time they collect their pay. In this way the aliens, who themselves deprive citizen workers of jobs at decent pay levels, are often victimized by unscrupulous employers who know that the aliens have no recourse to justice. As one government official, who has decried the widespread abuses and exploitation of the aliens, has stated: "nobody gives a damn since migrants are nobody's constituents."³⁴

Another serious impact of the illegal Mexican Nationals upon the rural economy of the Southwest is that, since the 1940's, they have been a factor in the pressure for Chicanos to move from rural to urban areas.³⁵ In the 1950 and 1960 Censuses, the Chicano population was the least urbanized of the three major racial groups who populate the Southwest (i.e., Chicanos, blacks, and whites who do not have Spanish surnames); the Census of 1970, however, showed Chicanos to be the most urbanized group. Often these Chicanos who have been displaced from the rural economy have been totally unprepared for their new life in an urban labor market. In this way, the illegal Mexican aliens have caused serious economic hardship and geographic dislocation to the Chicano labor force of the rural Southwest.

The illegal Mexican aliens have also had another adverse affect upon the citizen Chicanos. It is no accident that about half of the remaining seasonal migratory agricultural workers in the United States are Chicanos who come from the south Texas border region with Mexico. Many Chicanos of this region are literally forced to join the migratory labor force because the local labor market is overrun by illegal Mexican

aliens and border commuters (i.e., people who live in Mexico with its lower cost of living but, because of ambiguities in the immigration statutes, are able to work legally in the United States).³⁶ Although public policy in the United States has tried repeatedly to improve the economic plight of these citizen migrant workers by trying to prepare them for non-migrant vocations, all of these attempts have failed. The reason is that the programs have never been able to handle the basic problem that causes internal seasonal migrancy. Namely, there are too few job opportunities available in their home base communities that offer wages at a level that will permit a decent standard of life. The depressing forces caused by the influx of illegal Mexican immigrants and by the commuters have set in motion a process whereby poor Mexicans make poor Chicanos poorer.³⁷

The illegal Mexican aliens have been a continuing force to forstall efforts of workers in low wage industries of the Southwest to become unionized. Often their presence so depresses wages and working conditions that citizen workers who might otherwise seek to establish a trade union are forced to look elsewhere for employment. In the event that the citizen workers remain in the industry and attempt to form a union, the illegal Mexican aliens are frequently used as strikebreakers. The practice is illegal but laws do not enforce themselves. Although numerous instances could be cited, the most prominent contemporary example is the on-going saga of the United Farm Workers (UFW) to establish a union for agricultural workers throughout the Southwest. Cesar Chavez, the leader of the UFW, has repeatedly charged that employers are using illegal Mexican aliens as strikebreakers.³⁸ Chavez has stated that it is primarily because of the

inability to keep alien labor out of the fields that his union has had to appeal for a nationwide boycott as the only effective method to exert pressure on employers for bargaining recognition. As Chavez has stated:

The illegal workers from Mexico are a severe problem. It is a problem that is out of control We say, let them come in with their families, if the country needs them. Let them be legal. Then they will stand up for their rights.³⁹

The fact that the aliens are willing to work and that the employers need fear no penalty for hiring them has made unionization almost impossible. Again, it is most typically the citizen Chicanos who are the chief losers.

Since the mid-1960's, however, a growing proportion of the illegal Mexican immigrants have gone directly to urban areas to find low skilled jobs. Often those who go to the rural areas are called "beginners." That is, for many of them it is their first trip to the United States. The more experienced illegal aliens have found that the urban areas often pay more, the work is less arduous and, especially in the Southwest, it is just as easy to get "lost" in the urban barrio (i.e., ghetto) as it is in the open spaces of the rural areas. Also, agriculture is becoming more and more mechanized which means that the labor requirements have been diminishing in rural areas. The Immigration and Naturalization Service, for instance, estimates that there are over 150,000 illegal Mexican aliens employed in the city of Los Angeles alone. If this figure is near being correct, it would mean that there are more Mexican Nationals employed in Los Angeles than any city in Mexico except Mexico City and Guadalajara.⁴⁰ Here again, the illegal aliens move into the low wage sector of the economy, which has made an already desperate situation even worse for the citizen workers with whom they compete. The illegal workers, however, do not restrict themselves just to menial jobs. Increasingly,

craftsmen and other skilled and semi-skilled positions are being taken. Craft unions, especially in the building trades, have begun to campaign actively for tighter restrictions. The competition is not only for jobs but it is also for limited amount of low income housing, welfare funds, public health facilities, and community services. The few organizations that exist to assist the indigenous poverty population are forced to stretch their services to meet the ever-expanding needs of this additional clientele.

But perhaps the group that directly suffers the most is the citizen Chicano of the Southwest. For decades this racial and ethnic minority group has been struggling against discrimination and seeking assimilation into American life. Now, in the aftermath of civil rights revolution of the 1960's, they have come closer than ever before to the attainment of this elusive goal only to see their gains eroded away by the unfair competition of Mexican Nationals. The situation is best stated by the noted scholar on Chicano life in the United States, the late George I. Sánchez, who has written:

Time and time again, just as we [i.e., the Chicano population] have been on the verge of cutting our bicultural problems to manageable proportions, uncontrolled mass migrations from Mexico have erased the gains and accentuated the cultural indigestion.⁴¹

Indirectly, of course, the United States itself suffers from the existence of an increasing number of illegal Mexican Nationals in its midst. There may be some short run private sector gains that are realized by the selfish exploitation of the helpless group. But in the long run, the presence of a growing number of workers who are denied political rights as well as minimum legal and job protections is a prescription for an eventual show-down. Living at a survival level and under the constant

fear of being detected; working in the most competitive and least unionized sectors of the economy; and often being victimized by criminal elements it is easy to foresee a situation that will not only be out of control but which will be uncontrollable. Over the nearly two centuries of its existence, the United States has developed numerous laws, programs, and institutions that have been designed to reduce the magnitude of human cruelty and the incidence of economic uncertainty for most of its citizens. For the illegal alien workers, however, these benefits are virtually nonexistent. It would be an exercise of self-deception to believe that this situation can continue to mount at its current growth rate without eventual dire consequences to all parties concerned.

VI. Conclusions

The migration of Mexican Nationals into the United States represents one of the major migration movements in the world today. The single most prominent characteristic of this mass migration is its illegal and unregulated character. The second most significant feature is that neither the governments of Mexico or the United States are willing to acknowledge the importance of the problem and its related implications for both nations. Mexico has been content merely (1) to complain about alleged abuses of some illegal aliens who have been arrested and detained by U.S. authorities and (2) to propose that a contract labor program similar to the old bracero program of the 1942-1964 era be re-formalized. The United States government has, tragically, failed to grasp the full proportions of the issue. Unfortunately, illegal entry from Mexico is still considered to be only "a regional problem" of the Southwest. Hence, the topic is not very high on the list of national priorities. It is not surprising, therefore, that Samora, in his seminal work to date on the subject of illegal

Mexican entry, concluded that the two countries are "not even remotely agreed on a solution to the problem."⁴²

The immigration policy of the United States with respect to legal and illegal Mexican Nationals has never functioned in a vacuum. Historically, the policy has been related to domestic economic policy (i.e., more concern during periods of high unemployment, less during times of low unemployment); labor policy (i.e., a strong interest in Mexican Nationals as temporary and seasonal workers for low wage industries, less concern for them as permanent settlers); and racial policy (i.e. Mexican Nationals are a racial and ethnic minority group who have traditionally been treated by whites in a discriminatory manner). For these reasons it is not easy to untangle the current issue from its historical evolution.

It is argued by some that the focus of attention should be upon workers as workers and not as workers of one nation versus workers of another nation. In the 1970's when multi-national corporations move their products and funds with relative ease across international borders and where financiers speculate daily over anticipated changes in foreign currency rates, workers should not be divided by artificial political boundaries. There is, of course, some abstract support for this position in standard economic theory of free trade. The unimpeded movement of the world's economic resources supposedly assures that they will find their most rewarding and productive use and, thereby, maximize world output. But standard economic theory is essentially a form of social engineering in which individual differences of people and nations are minimized in the pursuit of aggregate social maximization. In the real world, there are political boundaries which shape the conditions of life within the various nation states of the world community. These borders not only

have social, cultural, and political importance, but they are of significant economic consequence. For it is largely within the confines of these boundaries that most of the crucial governmental policies that affect the quality of life for the citizens of each nation are made. Nominally there may be a world community, but the welfare of most people's life is dependent upon the decisions of their own governments. They expect their government to safeguard and to further their interests as best it can. Consequently, the study of political economy -- as has always been the case -- begins with the existence of political borders. The contention that the excesses of commercial and financial bodies means that labor too ought to be able to move in an unregulated manner hardly seems persuasive. One abuse does not legitimize another. Actually, of course, there has been a considerable effort in recent years by most nations of the world to control international trade and to regulate international monetary matters. The real deficiency of world attention today, it seems, is with policies to control the migration of workers. Each nation has been left to fend for itself. Hence, one is forced to offer recommendations in terms of what an individual nation can or should do.

In the present case of the migration of Mexican Nationals into the United States, there are a number of policy measures that are urgently needed. With respect to legal Mexican immigrants, there is the issue that their impact is unevenly felt. Specific cities and states have been hard hit. To assist in the absorption of these new citizens, the Federal government should provide "special impact" funds to school districts and community organizations who assist these immigrants in the settlement process. Ample precedent for such funds already exist in the form of similar programs to help local areas when large military bases or related defense

organizations are located in their community. In addition, special programs should be initiated in these high impact areas to assist immigrants to learn of existing legal protections for them; to make available information about training facilities and job placement centers; and to offer special classes in English with stipends for attendance.

Another needed reform is with the labor certification procedures associated with new immigrants. Since the Immigration Act of 1952, the Secretary of Labor has had the authority to block entry of immigrants if their presence endangers prevailing American labor standards. The Immigration Act of 1965 added to this authority. It requires that immigrant job seekers also receive a job certification which states that a shortage of workers exists in the applicants' particular occupation and that his or her presence will not adversely affect prevailing wages and working conditions. Aside from the fact that the entire procedure is fraught with loopholes, the problem is that the certification is made only once -- when the initial application for immigration is made. It has been suggested that a negative certification be adopted to assure that in actuality the legal immigrant workers do not seek employment in overcrowded occupations, or economically depressed areas, or serve as strikebreakers, or become employees of certain employers with histories of illegal activities.⁴³ The system would set up a probationary period of, say a year, during which time it could be ascertained whether the certification conditions are actually being fulfilled. It goes without need for elaboration that the certification system has simply too many loopholes. In a 1971 study of the topic, it was found that only 1 of every 13 immigrants to the United States was subject to the certification system.⁴⁴ This slippage is too great.

It is of course, the illegal Mexican aliens that constitute the major labor migration flow into the United States in the 1970's. The problem is already of such a magnitude that it may not even be possible to reduce it to manageable proportions. But the effort must be made. The presence of "a shadow labor force" of rightless individuals who are easy prey for the most exploititative elements of American society is bad for both the aliens and the nation. But of even greater consequence than the victimization of these illegal aliens is that, collectively, they constitute a clear and present danger to the standard of living of all with whom they compete for jobs, housing, and community services. In particular, the Chicano citizens of the Southwest have borne disproportionately the weight of this burden. Other groups, and other geographic areas are increasingly feeling this pressure. For these reasons, a number of policy changes are required. First, the absurdity of the situation whereby employers are virtually immune from prosecution when they employ illegal aliens should be terminated. Legislation making it a criminal act to employ illegal aliens should be adopted at once. Secondly, there is a need for a significant increase in the manpower and the budget of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to a level commensurate with the scale of its responsibilities. The increase should not only be for patrolling and apprehension duties but also for hearing officers and prosecutorial duties. The use of "the voluntary departure system" by INS should be actively discouraged. Records and identification of all arrestees should be made. Jail terms should be imposed on repeat offenders. In these ways, a posture of deterrence rather than acquiescence could be assumed. At the same time a concerted apprehension drive should be initiated by INS in the cities in which illegal aliens are known to reside to apprehend and

to return them to their native land. All appropriate civil liberty protections should be applied to be sure that no false arrests or mistaken deportations occur. But the message should be made clear: illegal alien workers from any country are unwanted guests. Concurrently with these efforts, other loopholes in the existing immigration policies which tolerate daily and seasonal commuter workers from Mexico should also be corrected.⁴⁵

Lastly, but of extreme importance, the United States should make overtures to Mexico concerning how efforts could be made to develop the economy of Mexico's northern states. Financial and technical aid should be made available. Mexico, however, should design the regional plan and set its own priorities. If the government of Mexico decides that it wants no part of such aid, then so be it. But it should be made apparent that a continuation of the existing unregulated exodus of its citizens is out of the question.

It is obvious that this issue does not lend itself to any nice solution. Either way, someone loses. If the proposed steps are enacted, most of the would-be illegal Mexican aliens are condemned to lives of squalor; if the prevailing practices continue, the illegal Mexican nationals and thousands of citizen workers (mostly Chicanos at present) with whom they compete will continue to work at the existence level of human survival in a generally surplus labor market. There are numerous humane policy alternatives available to assist migrant workers where the problem is excess demand for labor that causes the migrant flow. There are few where the problem is one of labor surplus other than trying to dam the stream. The latter is the case in the United States.

Personally, after years of both watching this dilemma become more and more acute and studying the horrible human impact that this uncontrolled migration has had on all parties, I have made my decision. The government of the United States must move to protect the interests of its own citizens who are threatened by this human on-slaught. The sooner the nation begins to enact the policies that are needed, the easier will be the eventual adjustment. The longer it postpones the inevitable, the harder the task. The question is not whether it should act but when it will and in what manner.

Footnotes

1. "Statement" by Senator Walter F. Mondale, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the U.S. Senate on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Powerlessness Part 7-B on "Manpower and Economic Problems," (April 15, 1970), Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 4548.
2. "Illegal Aliens Put at 3 Million", New York Times (January 27, 1974).
3. "Statement by Leonard F. Chapman, Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service," Chicago, (September 17, 1974), p. 2 (mimeographed material).
4. Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 52.
5. Julian Samora, "Mexican Immigration," paper presented at the Conference on Economic and Educational Perspective of the Mexican American (Aspen, Colorado, August 27, 1972), p. 9 and 10 and Table 1-A. (mimeographed material).
6. Ibid., p. 11
7. Ibid.
8. Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story (Charlotte, North Carolina: McNally and Loftin, 1964).
9. McWilliams, op.cit., p. 267.
10. E.g., see "Mexico to Seek Farm Labor Pact," New York Times, June 17, 1973.
11. David S. North and William G. Weissert, Immigrants and the American Labor Market, Research Report to the U.S. Department of Labor under contract number 20-11-73-01, (Washington: Trans Century Corporation, 1973), pp. 7-8.
12. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
13. Ibid., pp. 47-48.
14. Julian Samora, Los Mojados: The Wetback Story, (Notre Dame, Indiana: The Notre Dame Press, 1971), Chapter II.
15. The figures cited for the economy of the United States and Mexico are taken, respectively, from the Economic Report of the President: 1973 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973) and Economic and Social Progress in Latin America: Annual Report 1973 (Washington: Inter American Development Loan Bank, 1973).

16. Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., The Mexican-United States Border: Public Policy and Chicano Economic Welfare, Studies in Human Resources Development #2, (Austin, Texas: Center for Studies of Human Resources, 1974), p. 10-11.
17. The word "Chicano" is increasingly being used in the United States to refer to the group of citizens generally called "Mexican-Americans" in the literature. Militant Chicanos prefer the term because it accentuates the fact that many of them feel they are treated as Mexicans in the United States but as Americans in Mexico. Actually the term "Chicano" is an old phrase used by the indigenous Indian population of northern rural Mexico to refer to Spanish-blooded Mexicans. The Indians pronounced the word "Mexicano" as "Meh-chee-cano" and, over the years shortened the word simply to "Chicano."
18. Briggs, op.cit., pp. 10.15.
19. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee No. 1, Hearings on Illegal Aliens, pt. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 22, 1972), p. 1315.
20. Diaz v. Kay-Dix Ranch (1970), as reprinted in House of Representatives, Hearings on Illegal Aliens, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 21, 1971), p. 179.
21. Samora, Los Mojados, op. cit., p. 10.
22. Alejandro Portes, "Return of the Wetback", Society, Volume 11, No. 3, (March-April 1974), pp. 44.
23. Ibid.
24. For a good discussion of these economic conditions in the Mexican border cities, see Liborio V. Calderón, "Foreign Assembly Industries in Mexico: A Necessary Evil of an Underdeveloped Society"; Giorgio Berni, "Border Industry: The Case of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua"; and David Barkin, "Mexico's Albatross: The United States Economy," all of which are papers presented at the Conference on Economic Relations Between Mexico and the United States, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin, April 16-20, 1973.
25. Richard Severo, "The Flight of the Wetbacks", New York Times Magazine (March 10, 1974), p. 84.
26. Ibid.
27. Samora, Los Mojados . . ., P. 9-10.
28. Jack Webb, "People-Smuggling Racket is \$125 Million Business," Austin Statesman, (May 29, 1972), p. 15; Jack Webb, "'Hide-and-Seek' Keeps Border Patrol on Guard," Austin Statesman, (May 30, 1973), p. 30; Jack Webb "Sometimes Death Waits Along Live Cargo Route," Austin Statesman, (May 31, 1973), p. A-28; Jack Webb "Judge Sees Wire Fence as Way to Stop Racket," Austin Statesman, (June 1, 1973), p. 22.

29. Michael Mallory, "Human Wave of Mexicans Splashes across Border," National Observer, (October 16, 1971).
30. North and Weissert, op.cit., p. 2.
31. Ibid., p. X.
32. Samora, Los Mojados ..., p. 56.
33. Fred H. Schmidt, Spanish Surnamed Americans Employment in the Southwest (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 50.
34. E.G., see Laura A. Kierman, "5 Deported Aliens Sue for Md. Wages," Washington Post, (September 23, 1974), C-2.
35. Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., Chicanos and Rural Poverty (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), Chapter 4.
36. Ibid., pp. 42-44.
37. Briggs, The Mexico-United States Border, op.cit., pp. 10-21.
38. E.g., see "Chavez Charges Scheme," Washington Post, (September 23, 1974), p. C-3.
39. Severo, op.cit., p. 81.
40. Ibid.
41. George I. Sánchez, "History, Culture, and Education," in La Raza: The Forgotten Americans (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), p. 9.
42. Samora, op.cit., p. 46
43. North and Weissert, op.cit., pp. 178-180.
44. David S. North, Alien Workers: A Study of the Labor Certification Programs, (Washington, D.C.: Trans Century Corporation, 1971), pp. 95-96.
45. Briggs, The Mexico-United States Border...., op.cit., pp. 15.21.